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SUBJECT: TURKEY: ROLLING OUT THE MESSAGE ON AFGHANISTAN

REF: ANKARA 1712

Classified By: Pol Mil Counselor Anthony Godfrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

1. (C) Mission Turkey continued on December 2 the strong press for additional Turkish support for the President's strategy in Afghanistan. In separate meetings with both Minister of National Defense Vecdi Gonul and with MFA Deputy Undersecretary Namik Tan, the Ambassador pushed hard for Turkey to increase its contribution. The Ambassador and the Embassy Public Affairs Section pursued an activist roll-out strategy with the Turkish press, generating significant positive coverage for the President's speech and its key points. End Summary.

Def Min: "MORE Troops? But We Just Doubled Our Contingent..."

2. (C) At the Ministry of National Defense, Minister Gonul briefed the Ambassador on his telephone call the previous evening with Secretary of Defense Gates. Gonul said that he was surprised to have received a request for such a significant increase, given Turkey's more than doubling of its military contingent to Afghanistan in recent months, but said he would work to assemble an inter-agency team to develop a response.

3. (C) Gonul reviewed for the Ambassador Turkey's current contributions, in particular the 1785 troops deployed to Afghanistan (an increase of 1000 since the NATO Summit in April after which Turkey took command of RC-Capital). Turkey would increase the number of its OMLTs to four and was committed to training Afghan military and police; Gonul said that it had thus far trained 8000 Afghans in Afghanistan and an additional 450 in Turkey. Gonul pointed out that in addition to the USD 200 million it had contributed for civilian projects, there had been an additional USD 69 million in military assistance. Given Turkey's significant engagement in counter-PKK efforts, additional contributions would be very difficult.

4. (C) Gonul said that Turkey urgently needed a clearer idea of how and where the U.S. would request the additional Turkish contingent to deploy. On what did the U.S. base the request for 1500 troops? What role did the U.S. have in mind for this deployment? Where and under what command would the Turkish soldiers be asked to deploy? Gonul made it clear that Turkish forces could not/not serve in OEF, but would need to remain in ISAF. He also made clear that the two remaining caveats were a consensus government decision, and that it would be very difficult to remove them. The Ambassador said he would pass these requests to Washington, but drew attention to the shifting nature of key parts of the mission in Afghanistan to protection of the population; this was an aspect in which Turkish forces could be of great value and which would not damage Turkey's "soft power" with the populace. Gonul said that he would engage with colleagues

from the Turkish General Staff, the Finance Ministry (regarding potential financial contributions) and with the Foreign Ministry (since Turkey's PRT's are civilian led) so that the Prime Minister can make a coherent decision on the request for an additional contribution from Turkey in advance of his trip to Washington.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador urged Gonul to dig deep; NATO could not fail in this mission. The U.S. understood Turkey's demanding counter-PKK mission and was making a strong contribution to that effort, despite the precious nature of resources involved. The Ambassador acknowledged how sensitive a new Afghanistan deployment would be in domestic political terms, but urged that this was a time for Turkey's government to show leadership.

Public Diplomacy Full-Court Press  
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¶16. (U) The Mission's public strategy was activist as well. Drawing on the President's speech, the White House Fact Sheet and other materials, the Ambassador held a round-table discussion with eleven influential journalists from across Turkey's political spectrum. He also gave on-the-record interviews with key columnists. Press coverage of the President's speech and the Ambassador's reinforcement of the message with Turkey-specific points has been carried extensively by the media. (See Reftel and Ankara PAS E-mail reporting in PD channels for more details.)

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